

# River District Association

Rockford, IL

## Objectives & Strategies

Final

Version 1.0

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Document History:

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# **1. Overview & Mission:**

River District Association (RDA) is a private, 501(c)3 not-for-profit, membership based organization with over 550 members.

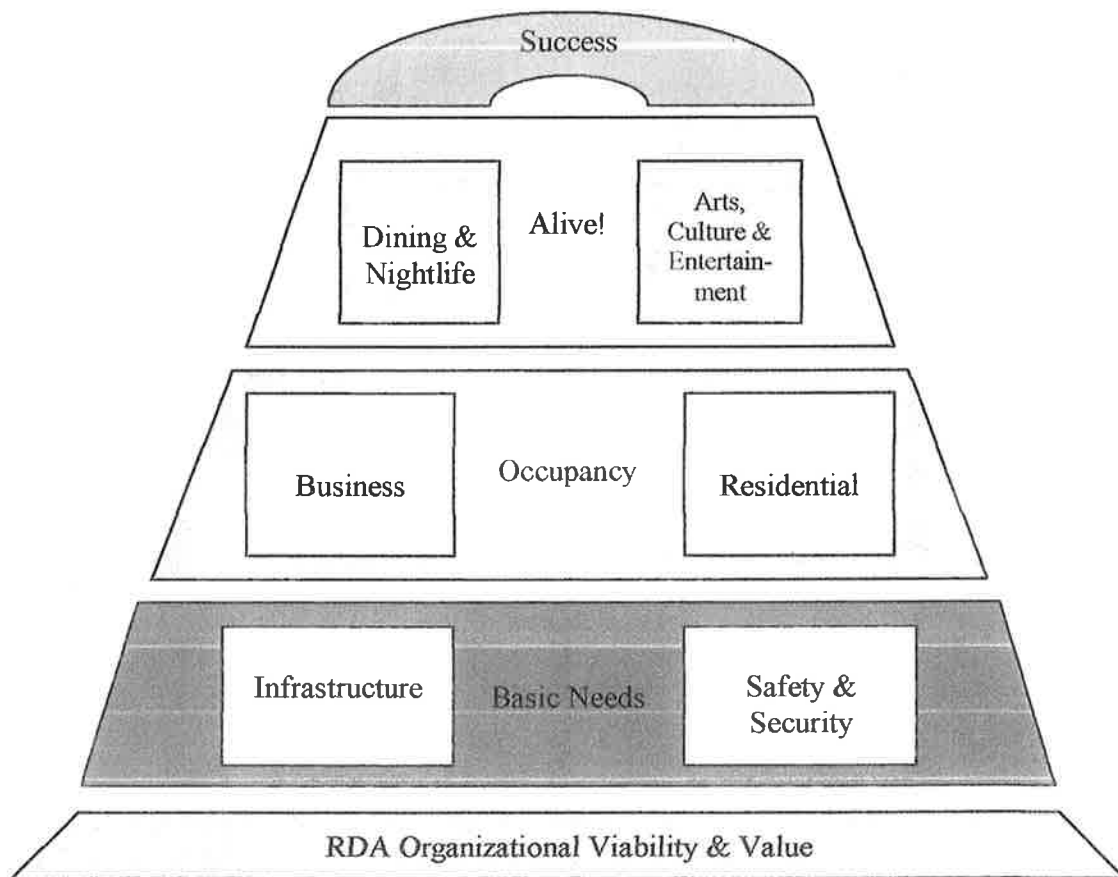
*The River District Association's mission is to promote a growing, thriving, prosperous business and residential community in Rockford's downtown neighborhood, River District.*

Rockford's downtown represents a vast amount of public and private investment. The RDA is uniquely positioned to impact communication, cooperation and progress, capitalizing on that investment and creating an environment that fosters economic growth and job creation. The RDA already has partnerships in place and supports the work of numerous other organizations. As the definitive authority on and advocate for downtown, RDA can lead initiatives that yield positive results for downtown businesses, the City of Rockford and the entire Rockford region.

## 2. Objectives:

The following primary objectives have been defined to: 1) provide guidance in planning and implementing improvement projects, and 2) provide a framework for the RDA in supporting policies and overall direction for the organization.

The objectives shall act as an umbrella under which all downtown improvements should be evaluated, and will help retain focus throughout the long-term revitalization process.



## **2.1. Infrastructure**

Adequate and modern infrastructure is a critical element of downtown revitalization and growth. Infrastructure is a core requirement to build upon and deliver all other objectives.

### **2.1.1. Advocate for Commuter Rail System Connecting Downtown Rockford to Chicago**

#### **Description:**

Providing access to a commuter rail system with frequent daily stops in downtown Rockford spurs growth in residential development and plays a critical role in transforming downtown. This strategy is viewed as one of the most important strategies, a “silver bullet”, in transforming downtown Rockford. While its attainment may take a long time, it is viewed as a worthwhile strategy to pursue.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Endorse initiatives & groups that support Amtrack and the commuter rail vision
2. Compile & articulate the economic impact of such a rail system to downtown
3. Establish interim alternatives to provide connection between downtown and existing nearby Metra

#### **Strengths:**

- Rockford has a strategic geographic location
- Rockford’s airport provides an alternative and relief to Chicago airports
- Rockford has a lower cost of living, making it an ideal “bedroom” community

#### **Obstacles:**

- Scope is larger than our focus region
- Significant funding is required
- Federal and state agencies must approve initiative

### **2.1.2. Preserve the Architectural Integrity and Historical Assets of Downtown**

#### **Description:**

This strategy aims to protect and restore Rockford's unique assets and history with the downtown. It is through achievement of this strategy that many other objectives including residential and arts and culture objectives can be attained.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Encourage reuse, rehabilitation, and reinvention of existing structures.
2. Provide information on financial tools available I.E.: Historical Tax Credits.

### **2.1.3. Ensure Friendly Navigation & Flow of Various Forms of Traffic**

#### **Description:**

Downtown visitors and residents should find it easy and pleasant to access downtown establishments. This strategy aims to provide that pleasant experience.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Redesign access points into downtown
2. Convert the one-way system to two-way
3. Leverage existing rail lines for use by a trolley system
4. Ensure presence of sidewalks on all commercial and residential streets
5. Ensure adequate maintenance of roads, lighting, signage, plantation, and snow removal
6. Report sidewalk and private road maintenance violations and ensure enforcement by the City



## **2.1.4. Improve Quality of the Built Environment**

### **Description:**

Help to create and maintain a high standard of quality of buildings, infrastructure and landscaping in downtown commercial and residential districts.

### **Tactics:**

1. Work creatively to help reduce the City's inventory of unused real estate
2. Support Home Rule efforts in order to have authority to deal with idle vacant properties
3. Report property maintenance violations and ensure enforcement by the City
4. Maintain relationships and engage with community groups

## **2.1.5. Advocate Access to World-Class Electrical Infrastructure**

### **Description:**

Electrical infrastructure is a critical deciding factor for any new development and expansion of residential and commercial projects, as it directly affects the cost of such projects. With available and ready-to-plug-in electrical infrastructure, recruitment of developers, businesses, and entertainment venues becomes much faster and easier.

### **Tactics:**

1. Revise future ComEd agreements to include transition of existing utility line to underground
2. Advocate deployment of power supply source used for festival and event lighting
3. Review all proposed ComEd projects to ensure availability of critical power features (3-Phase. etc.) in all commercial blocks

### **2.1.6. Advocate Access to World-Class Communication Infrastructure**

#### **Description:**

Communication infrastructure is a critical deciding factor for any new development and expansion of residential and commercial projects, as it directly affects the cost of such projects. With available and ready-to-plug-in communication infrastructure, recruitment of developers, businesses, and entertainment venues becomes much faster and easier.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Market current capabilities as part of the business recruitment program
2. Identify and advocate deployment of features missing from current capabilities

### **2.1.7. Advocate Adequate and Scalable Water & Sewer Infrastructure**

#### **Description:**

Water and sewer is a basic infrastructure that directly affects development. Build-out of this infrastructure is time consuming and capital intensive. In most cases, this infrastructure can not be built on a project-by-project basis. Therefore, advance planning and funding is required based upon a vision and demand for downtown revitalization plan.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Advocate funding of “smart” water & sewer projects

## **2.1.8. Advocate Establishment of the River as a Premier Recreational Asset**

### **Description:**

Rock River and its presence in downtown is one of our most valuable natural assets. We should recognize its value and establish a vision for how we may capitalize on it. Recreational use of the Rock River in downtown is consistent with other objectives that promote the occupancy and liveliness of downtown.

### **Tactics:**

1. Work with developers to provide adequate access for boaters
2. Ensure development of integrated River walks
3. Ensure presence of “friendly” Bike paths
4. Serve as an informational resource for developers interested in riverside development. Advocate for them to include amenities appropriate to the river location.

## **2.2. Safety & Security**

Safety and security is a basic human need and without it no other effort to revitalize downtown will be successful.

### **2.2.1. Advocate Transition of the Mentally Ill From Streets to Proper Care Facilities**

Description:

The mentally ill are frequently seen in various public locations in downtown. Depending on their state of mind at the time, they create a feeling of discomfort or, in some cases, endangerment. This perception is important in shaping public opinion about safety and security of downtown. It is critical to care for the mentally ill as they cannot be treated as criminals or and other homeless solutions do not apply to their unique situation.

Tactics:

1. Facilitate discussions with appropriate individuals and organizations to identify and address proper tactics for downtown

### **2.2.2. Manage Perception by Providing Accurate Information**

Description:

The public may have a perception regarding safety and security in downtown based on outdated or inaccurate information. It is critical to publish and share facts about downtown's safety and security and educate the public about real issues as well as real assets.

Tactics:

1. Maintain crime statistics including comparison of downtown versus other city districts, as well as downtown Rockford versus other similar size downtowns

### **2.2.3. Manage Perception by Improving Design & Regulations**

#### **Description:**

Design elements and visual aspects of downtown can shape public perception regarding safety and security of downtown. Through establishment and enforcement of design standards and codes and regulation, public perception can be turned positive.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Ensure clean & clear alleys and walkways
2. Ensure enforcement of loitering, pan handling, ...

### **2.2.4. Manage Perception by Implementing Infrastructure**

#### **Description:**

Both the reality and perception of public safety and security can be positively impacted if adequate infrastructure that deters crime is in place.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Encourage the installation of Security Cameras on main corridors
2. Encourage the installation of lighting in alleys and parking lots
3. Encourage increased and consistent police presence

### **2.2.5. Advocate Enforcement of Existing Laws**

#### **Description:**

Consistent and fair enforcement of existing laws serves as a deterrent to criminal activity. Criminal activity usually takes place where resistance is low and opportunity is high, so through consistent enforcement, we increase resistance and lower the opportunity for criminals to target downtown as their location of choice.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Encourage public involvement in reporting violations
2. Advocate proper enforcement of laws and appropriate behavior
3. Consistently exchange strategies and activities with the “right” officials
4. Identify gaps in actual violations versus reported crime. Use it to encourage public reporting and better enforcement
5. Specifically identify problem areas and determine solution on a case by case

## **2.3. Residential Occupancy**

Residential occupancy creates an environment where people are present throughout the day and night. It also increases the stakeholder's sense of ownership in terms of caring and advocating for downtown.

### **2.3.1. Promote Growth of Market-Rate Rental Housing**

Description:

Market rate rental housing brings a demographic to downtown with higher disposable income and lifestyle consistent with other objectives established to achieve our vision. Market rate rental housing is also a transition step for future condo conversions and home ownership.

Tactics:

1. Endorse projects that do not impose a cap on income for tenants
2. Encourage transition of subsidized housing to market rate housing
3. Establish "zoning overlay" preventing new and remodeled housing projects that impose a cap on income for tenants
4. Provide access to a database of available rental units
5. Target & market to a desirable demographics of residents
6. Recruit developers with specialty in downtown renovation; educate, support, their analysis of downtown opportunities
7. Provide information on financial incentives (special rate loans, exemptions, ...) to developers
8. Advocate for improved residential parking
9. Ensure adequate city services demanded by residents by communicating residential needs to City officials.

### **2.3.2. Promote Owner Occupied Housing**

#### **Description:**

Owner occupancy leads to better long term care of properties, a more stable residential base and creation of a sense of community.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Host informational programs about assistance for renovation/improvement of single family owner occupied homes in downtown
2. Advocate for the creation of additional assistance programs for renovation/improvement of owner-occupied homes downtown (TIF)
3. Target & market to the desirable residential demographics
4. Work with partners to establish financial incentives (special rate loans, exemptions, ...)

### **2.3.3. Attract Businesses Desirable to Residents**

#### **Description:**

Through identification and assistance in recruitment of businesses desired by residents such as corner stores, eateries, coffee shops, dry cleaners, and fresh produce stores, amenities viewed as necessary will be established, enhancing our ability to recruit a residential base to downtown.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Assist in recruitment of fresh produce store near residential areas
2. Assist in recruitment of corner store near residential areas
3. Assist in recruitment of eateries near residential areas
4. Assist in recruitment of coffee shops near residential areas

### **2.3.4. Promote Creation and Growth of Artist Live/Work Mixed-Use Buildings**

#### **Description:**

The artist live/work space is just one part of the downtown redevelopment plan. The development of this type of space will:

- Provide a safe working environment for artists that allows them to grow professionally, and achieve financial stability.
- Create a use for existing vacant or underutilized buildings.
- Promote community revitalization by attracting additional arts-friendly businesses and increased pedestrian traffic which appeals to younger people.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Collaborate with art organizations to connect with local and regional/national artists
2. Recruit developers with specialty in creating artists live/work spaces
3. Promote zoning regulations that enable creation of artists live/work space

### **2.3.5. Improve Safety & Security of Downtown Residents**

#### **Description:**

Safety and security for downtown residents continues to be a key influencer when choosing a location.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Promote demolition of abandoned and under-utilized buildings and houses, if not renovated with a specific period of time (home rule)
2. Encourage developers to incorporate lighting and security features (e.g. security cameras) into their projects
3. Encourage creation and continued support of neighborhood watch groups (community policing)



## 2.4. Business Occupancy

A downtown is a reflection of how a community sees itself and is therefore a critical factor in business retention and recruitment efforts throughout the City and region. The efforts of the RDA outlined above, combined with those of various partner organizations, will help achieve significant investment in the downtown commercial district resulting in growth in the number of businesses and jobs. Since 2005, the River District has seen a net gain of 51 new businesses, the expansion of 45 businesses and the addition of new residential properties. However, the downtown still faces significant challenges with numerous vacant buildings, blighted areas, and lagging private investment in our urban core.

### 2.4.1. Obtain & Manage Market Knowledge

#### Description:

In order to successfully identify and recruit entrepreneurs and business to Rockford's downtown, it is paramount to understand the current state of the downtown, track changes and analyze trends in the environment. By conducting market research and implementing a database to manage the information, RDA will be able to provide an accurate assessment of service gaps and opportunities which can then be packaged and marketed to potential developers, businesses and entrepreneurs.

#### Tactics:

1. **Perform Market Research:** Developers and businesses interested in locating downtown require information beyond basic traffic counts and available properties. Detailed daytime traffic reports (vehicular and pedestrian), downtown employee needs assessments and a nighttime perception analysis will assist RDA in identifying service and business opportunity gaps. By leveraging the resources and capabilities of the RAEDC, Rockford Local Development Corporation (RLDC), Rock Valley College Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) and Entrepreneurship Forum, Rockford Chamber of Commerce and the Illinois Entrepreneurship Network (IEN), RDA can then assist in identifying businesses with the ability to locate, develop and create jobs downtown.
2. **Maintain a Database of Information:** A robust database with the ability to track, manage and analyze market data will ensure RDAs ability to accurately recognize and forecast trends, define economic impact, and outline objectives and strategies for consistent economic and job growth in the downtown.

## 2.4.2. Facilitate Retention of Existing Businesses

### Description:

Effective retention strategies yield a higher return on investment than recruitment alone. Therefore, as part of our objective to increase overall business occupancy, retention of appropriate businesses is viewed as a critical strategy.

### Tactics:

1. Promote River District brand, region and assets – highlighting its businesses
2. Protect our key strategic assets such as Coronado, MetroCentre, and other arts and cultural facilities
3. Promote (cross promote) existing business relationships & networks
4. Advocate business-friendly regulations
5. Consult potential businesses regarding policies & processes
6. Provide information & educate business owners on relevant subjects & trends

## 2.4.3. Facilitate Attracting New Businesses

### Description:

Business growth strategies will concentrate on highlighting business and service opportunity gaps (as identified in the market knowledge research) in business recruitment collateral, developing a Resident Businesses Recruitment Plan and creating a comprehensive downtown Development Resource Center, a one-stop-shop for all information about developing in Rockford's downtown.

### Tactics:

1. **Business Recruitment Collateral:** RDA will supplement and update collateral items within the existing new business development package that highlight potential benefits to businesses locating downtown. Pieces will include new locations and opportunities, testimonials from successful companies now operating downtown, (Watt Publishing, Homer L. Chastain & Associates, Quiet Light Communications), updated community demographics/statistics and other vital information.
2. **Resident Business Recruitment Plan:** Businesses owned by residents of the community in which they operate have a lower turnover and offer the best opportunity for long-term success in Rockford's downtown given the current economic climate. With the partnership of

RAEDC, Rock Valley College Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) and Entrepreneurship Forum, Rockford Chamber of Commerce, Illinois Entrepreneurship Network (IEN), NIU and the Rockford Local Development Corporation (RLDC), RDA will assist in the creation of a Resident Business Recruitment Plan to encourage and support local entrepreneurs and businesses interested in locating, developing and creating jobs downtown.

3. **Downtown Development Resource Center:** With multiple agencies serving the various needs of potential businesses and developers, the RDA has the opportunity to create a comprehensive downtown Development Resource Center, a one-stop-shop for all information about developing in Rockford's downtown. RDA is considered by many as the authority on downtown issues and opportunities. By creating a physical and virtual downtown Development Resource Center, the RDA will remove one of the major hurdles for downtown developers, tenants and businesses—coordinating information and resources from multiple agencies.

A physical presence for the Development Resource Center within the RDA offices, as well as a virtual resource center available from the RDA website will provide information covering:

- i. Incentives for businesses locating downtown
  - ii. Downtown initiatives led by other groups (RAEDC, SBDC, RLDC, Next Rockford, The Element)
  - iii. TIF Districts, Historical tax credits
  - iv. City and County codes and regulations
  - v. Downtown Residential Neighborhood Organization
  - vi. Available properties and spaces Residential loft opportunities
  - vii. Latest renovation projects and expansions, and new construction
  - viii. Future plans and projects
  - ix. River front developments
  - x. Latest Capital Improvement projects effecting downtown
  - xi. Vision of downtown's future
4. Facilitate marketing of available spaces
  5. Actively recruit additional key strategic assets such as Metra, White Water Park, Convention Hall/Hotels
  6. Consult potential businesses regarding policies & processes
  7. Provide information & education on relevant subjects

## **2.5. Dining & Nightlife**

A critical element of downtown revitalization is transformation of downtown into a destination. A developed dining and nightlife economy makes a destination desirable to residents of downtown and enhances our ability to attract people and commerce from surrounding areas.

### **2.5.1. Advocate for Regulations That Encourage Dining & Nightlife**

#### **Description:**

Effective regulations directly impact the ability of establishments to transform downtown into a dining and nightlife destination. It is a common misconception that more relaxed regulations, or a lack thereof, lead to success of this objective. However, the establishment of a more complete and thoughtful regulations are required for sustained success. Conversely, some municipalities prohibit certain activities simply because they have not thought through establishment of appropriate rules and regulation and therefore, by default, they exclude them. We are in favor of more sophisticated and thoughtful regulations that protects the interests of all parties involved—the public, establishment owners/operators and the City.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Work with the City to revise current codes & regulations to allow consumption of alcoholic beverages and food with logical (non-fenced) boundaries.
2. Work with the City to revise health codes to allow open-air dining
3. Work with the City to revise regulation to allow vendors on public property
4. Work with the City to revise regulation to allow buskers on public property
5. Evaluate the value and impact of later bar liquor hours in downtown
6. Encourage City licensing personnel to explore alternatives to accommodate vendors
7. Bring change to the City's customer service approach to encourage attraction of businesses and their patrons
8. Advocate for financial incentives (special tax, etc?) to ensure continuous support from the City to promote and accommodate downtown events
9. Assist in streamlining the application process(es) to expedite initial filing and renewal of various permits & licenses

## **2.5.2. Advocate for Establishing Downtown as a Dining Destination**

### **Description:**

Successful execution of this strategy will result in creation of “districts” within downtown with focus on unique culinary offerings. We do not expect recruitment of national chain restaurants in the near future based current traffic count. However, we will leverage the presence of current eateries to create a more complete, unique culinary experience.

### **Tactics:**

1. Attract businesses (owner-occupied/operator) with sustaining business models to ensure their long term success
2. Create higher density of restaurants within close proximity to create walkable & identifiable dining zones
3. Encourage culinary mix to ensure diversity of cuisine, price and demographic appeal
4. Promote brand & identity to build a positive perception of downtown dining
5. Promote establishments and downtown dining experience

## **2.5.3. Advocate for Establishing Downtown as a Nightlife & Event Destination**

### **Description:**

Successful execution of this strategy will result in creation of nightlife districts within downtown with focus on unique and tasteful nightlife and event destination. These districts are not exclusive to certain venues and represent overlays with other types of destinations. However, it is critical to create such districts to establish density of establishments and promote a setting that enables waking from one location to another.

### **Tactics:**

1. Create higher density of venues within close proximity to create walkable & identifiable dining and nightlife zones.
2. Discourage holding events and venues that create a negative perception of downtown’s nightlife experience
3. Promote brand & identity to build a positive perception of downtown nightlife destination
4. Promote establishments and downtown nightlife experience
5. Establish a single web site where events and special offers are listed
6. Increase the frequency of events held downtown
7. Encourage, support & facilitate holding events frequently to present a full calendar of choices for patrons

## **2.6. Arts, Culture & Entertainment**

A critical element of downtown revitalization is transformation of downtown into a destination. Arts, Culture and Entertainment venues are attractive to residents of downtown and enhance our marketability to people and commerce from surrounding areas.

### **2.6.1. Advocate Growth & Retention of Cultural Venues Including Coronado PAC, Downtown Museums, MetroCentre, Mendelssohn PAC, Rockford Woman's Club, Rockford Public Library & Others**

#### **Description:**

Current cultural venues positively impact many businesses downtown. They also play a key roll in attracting people, a critical element of downtown revitalization. Investment in and focus on retention of current downtown cultural venues delivers a much higher return on investment than focusing on recruitment, or doing nothing at all.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Maintain a strong advocacy role to ensure adequate funding remains in place
2. Encourage the public to support venues by participating in their programs
3. Promote downtown venues by establishing a single place for visitors to go for information about events
4. Gather and provide feedback regarding programming requested by prospective visitors

## **2.6.2. Advocate Growth & Retention of Cultural Institutions**

### **Description:**

Cultural institutions provide the programming and content attractive to visitors who support our venues. They are an important element in ensuring that quality programs are continuously available to the public, and that the public regards downtown as an attractive destination.

### **Tactics:**

1. Maintain a strong advocacy role to ensure adequate funding remains in place
2. Encourage the public to support arts & cultural organizations by participating in their programs
3. Facilitate the growth of arts & entertainment programming through advocacy, consultancy and leadership
4. Gather and provide feedback regarding programming requested by perspective visitors
5. Work with RACVB to ensure adequate emphasis on visiting downtown institutions

## **2.6.3. Serve as a Forum to Coordinate, Communicate, and Promote Entertainment Events**

### **Description:**

While there will always be many organizations focused on different aspects of arts and cultural events, there must be one organization serving as the facilitator and coordinator of such events. This value added role is critical to eliminate duplication of efforts, facilitate communication, and provide a single point of contact for the public.

### **Tactics:**

1. Ensure frequent (weekly), and continuous programming available
2. Ensure suitable and affordable venues are available with proper infrastructure and equipment to support programming
3. Establish RDA as the authority for determining appropriateness and timing of outdoor events through operation of a forum to coordinate licensing and communicate scheduling
4. Identify gaps in venues and programming and facilitate the recruitment of desired venues and events

## **2.6.4. Facilitate Establishment of a Center for the Arts & Cultural Programs in Downtown**

### **Description:**

Facilitate creation and operation of a non-traditional school targeting students looking for arts and culture for fulfillment of personal interest – not formal education

### **Tactics:**

1. Focus on classes and programs as a non-accredited curriculum
2. Start with a few key programs and expand slowly to establish identity
3. Recruit key college partners/art organizations to offer programming, gain credibility, and leverage their network and expertise
4. Recruit key operators
5. Leverage existing programs to facilitate launch and ensure available funding and support



## **2.7. RDA Organizational Viability**

The rationale for this objective is simple. If we are not viable, we will not survive. And if we don't survive, our mission will not be accomplished. Therefore, while we execute our strategies as outlined in this document, we must remember that an effective operating model for the organization and solid financial performance is our underlying objective.

### **2.7.1. Implement Continuous Fund Raising Activities**

#### **Description:**

This strategy is designed to maximize fund raising and revenue generation through exploration of all available sources. It is also designed to ensure a more even and predictable flow of funds throughout our operating calendar.

#### **Tactics:**

1. Continuously establish, review and evaluate the sources of funds and revenue to determine the mix yielding the best return on effort.
2. Assign responsibility for each source and type of funding as outlined below. Implement a tracking process to ensure goals are met.
3. Grants: Obtain services of a professional grant writer who is compensated based on Grants that are secured. Act as facilitators to recruit entities to execute the project supported by Grants.
4. Corporate sponsorship: Cultivate corporate relationships by exploring board member relationships and contacts. Understand corporate sponsor's motivation for particular projects or events.
5. Charitable donations: Network with existing and potential donors including law firms, accountants, money managers that are involved in charitable donation decisions. Articulate the value and mission of the RDA.
6. Events: Ensure all events are identified with a purpose, are fun and entertaining, provide the opportunity for networking, and emphasize the uniqueness of our community. Ensure adequate time to plan and market each event.
7. City of Rockford: Continue to articulate our value and performance in accordance to our contract.
8. Government: Ensure various governmental contacts are aware of our mission and obtain consideration for potential funding.

## **2.7.2. Establish Meaningful Relationships to Gain Influence and Authority**

### **Description:**

This strategy is critical to ensuring our ability to execute many of the strategies outlined in this document. Forming and nurturing strong relationships, coupled with credibility gained through effective execution of our strategies, significantly enhances our ability to deliver more value.

### **Tactics:**

1. Design the composition of the RDA Board and committees to ensure participation from other non-governmental, non-profit groups with focus on downtown revitalization
2. Proactively research important issues. Hold public forums to formulate a position on such issues based on public input. When appropriate, publish position papers and make RDA members and investors aware of official RDA opinions.
3. Regularly communicate accomplishments, RDA positions, and issues of upcoming interest.
4. Collaborate with and engage groups that support initiatives consistent with RDA's strategies
5. Ensure our core role of facilitation is done properly and our accomplishments are fairly communicated

## **2.7.3. Implement a Cooperative Marketing Campaign**

### **Description:**

The "Live It Up downtown" marketing efforts have created a recognizable identity and brand for the River District and its businesses. A second phase of this campaign will capitalize on the success of phase one and allow small businesses the opportunity to participate in local and regional advertising they could not otherwise afford. The second phase of "Live It Up Downtown" will be divided into four focus areas: Arts & Culture, Retail, Dining & Nightlife and Recreation.

The RDA would coordinate media buys appropriate to each of the four focus areas and allow RDA businesses and organizations to place ads under the "Live It Up Downtown" umbrella at a discounted cost. Smaller businesses will have the opportunity to position themselves in front of a larger local and

regional audience, while the RDA highlights the unique shopping and service opportunities available overall in the downtown.

Tactics:

1. **“Live It Up Downtown” online/virtual tour:** Downloadable 3 -5 minute featurettes of downtown businesses available online from the River District Association website. Small DVD/CD ROMs would also be available to distribute at trade shows and business recruitment events. Featurettes could be disseminated through viral marketing outlets such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to target a younger demographic not often reached through traditional advertising media. This is especially valuable to support efforts to recruit knowledge and creative class workers to the region.
2. **Television:** Television ads in a “donut” format place River District and “Live It Up Downtown” campaign elements at the start and conclusion of each spot with business/organization-specific information placed in the center.
3. **Regional/National Print:** RDA would purchase co-op ad space with regional media in addition to participating in regional marketing campaigns coordinated by RACVB. Publications may include Northwest Quarterly Magazine, TravelHost Magazine, West Suburban Living and the Rockford Register Star. In addition to targeting a visitor population, RDA would create business-centric ads highlighting downtown’s attractive amenities including incentive programs, infrastructure investment plans, historical significance, and demographics of individuals living and working downtown. Regional business publications may include Business Profile Magazine, Crains Business Magazine, BusinessRockford.com, The McHenry County Business Journal and McHenry NOW Newsletter.
4. **Radio:** Spots targeting the four focus areas of the downtown could promote the downtown businesses and events on a regional level. Timing the radio buy with collaborative events coordinated by the RACVB magnify the overall impact.

## **2.7.4. Maintain & Grow Membership Base by Continuous Delivery and Demonstration of Value**

### **Description:**

Membership revenue represents a significant portion of our funding. It is critical to ensure this revenue stream is protected and growing.

### **Tactics:**

1. Create a clear and well articulated “RDA value summary page” targeted at recruiting individuals and family members
2. Create a clear and well articulated “RDA value summary page” targeted at recruiting business members and individuals
3. Target member recruitment to downtown supporters regardless of where they live
4. Distinguish value received by members versus non-members. Articulate the difference and use it to signup new members or maintain existing membership
5. “Cooperative membership drive”
6. “Loyalty rewards to ensure member retention”